

# **DoD Working Toward First-Class Civilian Education System**

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**W**ASHINGTON - DoD has a potential civilian employee problem, and Jerome Smith is working on preventing it. The problem is that thousands of highly skilled "baby boomers" will become eligible to retire shortly. Any mass exodus would leave a giant "skills gap" in DoD's civilian workforce. Smith said DoD should start planning to fill the gap now, before it's too late.

When Smith was sworn in as DoD's first chancellor of civilian education and professional development on Oct. 2, 1998, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen touted the appointment as a new era in DoD's education of its civilian workforce. He tasked Smith with creating a world-class education and professional development system for civilian employees patterned after the best aspects of the military system and corporate America.

"We're looking at the lessons corporate America has learned and is willing to share with us about being world-class competitors," said Smith. "We'd like to take the best of what they've learned and incorporate it into our system."

He noted that a lot of the baby boomers' replacements are already in DoD's workforce and looking at a new era of tremendous technological and socioeconomic change. Smith said DoD must ensure its education and professional development programs prepare these new leaders and managers to do as well or better than their predecessors.

And then there's another high hurdle to cross — recruiting.

"[Because] we must compete with a robust economy for top-quality people, we need to make the Department operate effectively," said Smith, the principal advocate for the academic quality and cost-effectiveness of all DoD civilian education and professional development activities.

Successful world-class companies know their workforce is their most important asset, and so they use education and professional development programs



Dr. Jerome Smith, DoD  
Chancellor for Education and  
Professional Development

to attract and retain quality people, he noted.

"That's what we need to do if we're going to be competitive with those same corporations for the workforce," Smith emphasized. He said potential employees need to know what DoD can offer that would make Defense the place they want to work.

Smith visited several firms in Northern California's Silicon Valley to see how those high-tech, high-performance companies treat their employees. "They offer wonderful education and professional development to their people for many reasons," he said. "Part of it is to

help them get their product out. Part is to keep their people at the front of the technological revolution, and part of it is to meet their employees' personal needs for their own personal growth.

"That's our competition," he emphasized. "If we want to play in that market, we have to provide the same type of high-quality education and professional development for our workforce." Smith said all DoD civilian employees should know they will receive the appropriate training required for advancement and to do their jobs as well as they can be done. He said he's working toward an education and professional development system that will be personally rewarding for DoD employees.

"We're going to provide a system that makes us competitive," Smith said. "And, it will make our people enjoy their work and feel that they are current and are building their own educational portfolio as they progress through their Defense career. We want people to feel good about working in DoD because it's an important enterprise and critical to our nation's survival."

Ensuring that all of DoD's educational institutions gain accreditation is Smith's first goal. The second is to publish standards that DoD demands of institutions and [identify] programs that are suitable for the workforce.



"Another goal would be to build a true community of DoD civilian educators," he said. "We need coherence because that's what characterizes the good parts of our volunteer education program, K through 12 program, and our military education and training program. We need the same thing on our civilian side."

Smith said his office has become a broker for accreditation of DoD institutions through the voluntary accreditation process in use in American higher education and recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Some DoD educational institutions, such as the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, lead the way with multiple accreditations. The university, in Bethesda, Md., has regional and specialized accreditations for its doctor, nurse, and doctorate programs.

War colleges and military academies have been accredited for a long time, said Smith, a former leader of a couple of colleges at the National Defense University, a fully accredited institution authorized to give masters' degrees.

"We have other institutions that have specialized accreditations, such as the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md., which trains military journalists, broadcasters and photojournalists," Smith said. "It has been accredited by the Council on Occupational Education, a specialized accreditor recognized by the Department of Education."

But, he pointed out, not all DoD institutions are accredited — yet. "We can do it," he said.

Since DoD is moving toward an information-based Department from a production-based operation, Smith said DoD's workforce should be educated in the jobs workers will have in the new information age.

For example, Smith said Jacques S. Gansler, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, is already encouraging his staff to keep learning. "He has issued a continuing education policy document, which requires a certain number of hours of education and professional development every two years for that large workforce — about 150,000 people," Smith said.

DoD also has a superb voluntary education program that allows servicemembers and civilian workers to attend off-duty classes at civilian education institutions, according to Smith.

"What we really don't have is a similarly organized civilian education program," he noted. "That's what we're focusing on improving now."

Smith said since becoming chancellor, he has established a fully manned office and created a Web site. He and his staff planned and hosted the first DoD conference on civilian education and professional development and scheduled the second for Aug. 8-9 at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

He has also organized the DoD Metrics of Excellence Task Force, which is laboring to produce standards for DoD educational institutions. The third steering committee meeting is scheduled for June 28 at Smith's office in Arlington, Va.

Smith wants his legacy to be an education and professional development system that results in a world-class civilian workforce. He said the workforce should be comparable and suitable for the support of DoD's already world-class military.

Calling himself "a product of the military education system," Smith said he's a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. The Navy also sponsored him through a Stanford University doctoral program.

"That education had some bearing on most every job I was assigned in the Navy," he said. "That ultimately led to my assignment as the commandant of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces — one of our two senior joint war colleges. So I've participated in the education program from the beginning to the end."

"Those exposures convinced me that the military has a very fine professional military education system with the kinds of characteristics that a system needs to have — clear goals, clear assignment of responsibility," said Smith. "There are feedback mechanisms, and tracking mechanisms which measure the quality of the outputs at all the key points."

"I'm convinced those characteristics are what makes the military system so good," he said. "We don't have that same systematic approach in civilian education because we are, for many reasons, divided up in a different way. But there are elements in that process that we can bring into our civilian education system to improve the process."

More information about Smith's office and DoD Education and Professional Development is on the Internet at [www.chancellor.osd.mil](http://www.chancellor.osd.mil).

**Editor's Note:** Williams is a public affairs specialist with the American Forces Press Services. This information is in the public domain at [www/defenselink.mil/news](http://www/defenselink.mil/news).